

## 5 Key Steps to Alzheimer's End of Life Planning

### □ 1. Discuss Early

Talking with your loved one about his or her end of life wishes should take place as soon as possible, before dementia inhibits productive conversation.

• **End of life discussion tips:**

- Keep it light.
  - Include immediate family members only.
  - Don't make it an intervention; put yourself in your loved one's shoes and consider how you'd like to be approached about this topic.
  - Make good use of a holiday gathering.
  - Limit initial expectations and allow your loved one to process his or her thoughts.
- **Complete the *Five Wishes* document**, which allows individuals with dementia to let family and doctors know:
- Who can make healthcare decisions in my place when I can no longer make them for myself.
  - The kind of medical treatment I want or don't want.
  - How comfortable I want to be.
  - How I want people to treat me.
  - What I want my loved ones to know.



Learn how to keep end of life discussions and decisions from causing family conflicts at [www.SolvingFamilyConflict.com](http://www.SolvingFamilyConflict.com).

### □ 2. Establish Advance Directives

Advance Directives – legal documents that allow individuals to detail their decisions about end-of-life care in advance.

- **Living Will** – A set of written instructions specifying preferences about the types of life-prolonging medical treatments a person does or does not want to have.
- **Health Care Power of Attorney** – A legal document that appoints a trusted individual to make decisions for the Alzheimer's or dementia patient with regard to medical care, and it becomes

effective when the individual can no longer communicated effectively or coherently with others.

- Questions for seniors and their health care power of attorney to discuss:
  - Does the senior want aggressive health care measures or life-prolonging treatments in the event of a chronic and debilitating illness?
  - Does the senior want to be resuscitated in the event of heart failure or stopped breathing?
  - Are there any medical treatments to which the senior has a religious objection?

Learn more about appointing a health care power attorney by visiting [www.ReturningHome.com/attorney](http://www.ReturningHome.com/attorney).

### □ 3. Share and Preserve Memories

Preserving and enriching important family memories will ensure the contribution that your loved one with Alzheimer's has made to the family heritage remains intact.

#### • Memory Sharing Activities

- Look through old photo albums together.
- Create a scrapbook.
- Tell "I remember when" stories and record them on video.
- Re-read saved letters and greeting cards.
- Pass family heirlooms on to the next generation.
- Listen to music associated with your loved one's younger years.
- Create a map of your family's genealogy and record information about prior generations that your loved one may still remember.
- Bake a special family recipe together.

Asking questions can spark a meaningful conversation full of special memories. Someone living with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias will particularly appreciate the opportunity to pass on personal history and wisdom before it's too late.

#### • Conversation starters:

- When you were a teenager, what did you and your friends do for fun?
- What are some of the most valuable things you learned from your parents?
- What did your grandparents and great grandparents do for a living?
- When you were growing up, what did you dream you would do with your life?
- What accomplishments in your life are you most proud of?

Find more ideas for [capturing and leveraging memories](http://www.HelpForAlzheimersFamilies.com) at [www.HelpForAlzheimersFamilies.com](http://www.HelpForAlzheimersFamilies.com) and click on the "Preserving Memories From Alzheimer's" tab.

## □ 4. Plan for Care

It's important to understand the progressive nature of Alzheimer's and the [characteristics of its final stages](#) so you can plan accordingly for care.

### Care Considerations:

- Someone entering late stage Alzheimer's will likely require [personal care assistance](#) to bathe and use the toilet or manage incontinence
- 24/7 care is needed as the person becomes completely dependent on others
- Safety and fall-prevention measures must be taken to accommodate decline in mobility
- May become more susceptible to other illnesses
- Even though the person with Alzheimer's may not seem to remember, recognize or respond to anything, he or she can still feel personal touch and loving attention
- Depending on the severity of symptoms and behaviors, skilled nursing, palliative or hospice care may be needed.

Learn about the broad spectrum of long-term Alzheimer's [care options available](#) for individuals in the end stages of the disease at [www.CaregiverStress.com](http://www.CaregiverStress.com) under the Dementia & Alzheimer's Disease caregiving topic.

## □ 5. Let Yourself Grieve

Losing a loved one to Alzheimer's disease, a process often known as "the long goodbye," is an emotional experience for everyone. Sadness, anger, frustration and grief are all natural feelings to have and need to be expressed—in a healthy way.

### Methods for managing emotional stress:

- Talk with family members and friends
- Join an Alzheimer's support group
- See a professional counselor
- [Take care of yourself](#) – get enough sleep, exercise, eat right, and make sure you take time to do something you enjoy
- Maintain any religious or spiritual practices you may have

For more help getting through the emotional journey of Alzheimer's, visit [www.facebook.com/RememberForAlzheimers](http://www.facebook.com/RememberForAlzheimers).

Visit [CaregiverStress.com](http://CaregiverStress.com) to learn more ways to cope with caring for a loved one with [Alzheimer's and other dementias](#), as well as expert advice from [Dr. Amy D'Aprix](#) and other videos, articles, and [resources for family caregivers](#).